THE FORGED™

RUCKA · TRAUTMANN · HENDERSON · WOODARD · MAHER

image

ISSUE 005

A BRUTAL BRAWL FOR
BREAKFAST!

SHOCKING SHORE LEAVE
REVELATIONS!

THE SNIPER SIGHTS A
SWEETHEART!

THE FORGED™

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For centuries, all of known space has been
the realm of **Her Eternal Majesty, the Empress.**

Elite teams of soldiers, **THE FORGED**, serve Her
with fierce loyalty and total determination. Cloned from
the Empress's genetic template, these women—armed and armored
with devastating weaponry and technology—are the ultimate
extension of Imperial will.

FORGED team **SCIMITAR-3**—composed of team leader **VICTORY**, heavy weapons specialist **CRAZYJO**, combat engineer **HAP**, medic **PUSHER**, and sharpshooter **HARPO**—has recently returned from a deadly mission at the far reaches of Imperial space and found themselves unexpected guests of Her Unending Glory, the Empress.

Their recently completed mission has also revealed a terrifying threat to the Empire—the existence of a hostile alien species, called **THE PHOBES**, that lives within T-space, the alternate dimension Imperial warships use to traverse the length and breadth of known space.

As SCIMITAR-3 enjoys some well-earned downtime, they
unknowingly find themselves the targets of intrigues that have begun to
swirl around them in the wake of the revelation of the Phobes' existence: the
plotting of a cadre of high-ranking officers within the Imperial military; the
machinations of the Empress's top spymaster, **GENERAL DAVIAN**; and the
conspiracies of a cabal of **CASSANDRAS**, the Empress's legion
of telepathic precognitives.

If the Phobes can prevent the Empire from accessing T-space, it could cause galaxy-wide panic, insurrection, and the end of Imperial rule. Yet, amidst this behind-the-scenes turmoil and scheming, perhaps the most dangerous threat awaits Victory.

She has attracted the interest and favor of the **Empress Herself**...

THRONEWORLD, HEART OF THE EMPIRE

SECTOR ZERO

APPROACH CORRIDOR 21:1:0:2

RESTRICTED AIRSPACE

THE FOREVER PALACE

PRIMARY RESIDENCE OF HER ETERNAL UNENDING MAJESTY AYLIS AESCHELLA TESSA TAN SHAARA-IATEN THE FIRST

0928 HOURS

FORM UP!

ATTENTION!

FOR FUCK'S SAKE.

FS3-ALPHA, REPORTING AS ORDERED.

PRIME NICIENZA RAB, OF HER ETERNAL MAJESTY'S *PERSONAL* GUARD.

AN *HONOR*, FORGED.

I'M **NOT** AN OFFICER. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SALUTE ME.

WE **KNOW.** BUT YOU **ARE** HERE AT HER INVITATION...

...AND THUS WE PAY DEFERENCE TO YOUR **PRESENCE,** AND NOT YOUR **RANK.**

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT.

WE **DON'T** DO IT FOR EVERYONE, LET'S JUST LEAVE IT AT **THAT.**

APPRECIATE IT, THEN.

GLAD TO HEAR IT, BECAUSE THE NEXT PART YOU MAYBE **WON'T.**

YOU'RE **LATE.**

THE FUCK I AM. I'M HALF A CYCLE **EARLY.**

YES, WELL...

...WE HAVE A LOT OF GROUND TO COVER....

FLK
FLK
FLK
FLK
FLK
FLK
FLK

YOU DIDN'T SAY SHE WOULD BE LATE.

BEGGING OUR ETERNAL'S FORGIVENESS, WE DID NOT LOOK TO THIS EVENT ON HER BEHALF.

WHY NOT?

THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, ISN'T IT?

TO FORESEE ON BEHALF OF THE EMPIRE?

INDEED, OUR ETERNAL, THIS IS SO.

AND ARE WE NOT THE EMPIRE?

YES, MY EMPRESS, YOU ARE OUR HOME.

THEN WHY WAS THIS NOT SEEN?

THEY WILL ARRIVE IN EIGHT SECONDS, ETERNAL.

EVERYONE! ACT NORMAL!

RIGHT, HERE WE ARE.

READY FOR THE STRAGATH LAIR?

HEY, I TOLD YOU THAT STORY IN CONFIDENCE.

AND I'LL TAKE IT WITH ME TO MY *GRAVE.*

GO.

MY ETERNAL EMPRESS, GUESTS OF THE COURT, FLAG OFFICERS, AND ILLUSTRIOUS CASSANDRAS, I PRESENT TO YOU AS REQUESTED BY IMPERIAL COMMAND, FS3-ALPHA...

...SHE OF THE WARNAME *VICTORY!*

FOR FIVE OF THE TWO

LAST TIME BUT OILED

INSIDE THE CONVERTER

WOULDN'T DARE...

...

MY EMPRESS *COMMANDS,* AND I OBEY.

RISE.

YOU KEPT US **WAITING,** FORGED.

WE ARE UNUSED TO THAT.

WE TRUST YOU ARE MORE **RELIABLE** IN THE **FIELD.**

heh heh heh

hah hah hah

OH VERY **WITTY,** ETERNAL

AND IN THE **PALACE,** I SAY

DOES LOOK LIKE SHE GOT **LOST**

JUST LET ANYONE...

hah heh hah

...IN HERE...

LEAVE US.

AS MY ETERNAL COMMANDS--

NO!

NOT YOU, FORGED...

...YOU, ALL OF YOU...

...GO AWAY, GET OUT...

...WE WOULD BE ALONE WITH OUR FORGED.

K-THUNK

NOW THEN...

...LET'S HAVE **BREAKFAST!**

I'M **HUNGRY,** ARE YOU HUNGRY? I'M **STARVING!**

THE KVENCHA COMB IS **SUBLIME,** AND ONE OF THE CHEFS MAKES THE MOST **BEAUTIFUL** ARRANGEMENTS OF GOSSAMER SUUL.

I AM **SO** EXCITED FOR THIS! I HAVE **SO** MANY QUESTIONS!

I'VE NEVER EVEN GOTTEN TO **MEET** ONE OF YOU BEFORE YESTERDAY, AND THAT WAS THE **MOST** EXCITING THING TO HAPPEN HERE IN **AGES!**

BUT HONESTLY, VICTORY, **ANYTHING** YOU WANT, YOU ONLY HAVE TO **ASK** FOR IT...

...ABSOLUTELY **ANYTHING....**

MILITARY ORBITAL FACILITY L51-D ("THE CASTRA")

MARKSMANSHIP RANGE D-109-L
AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

NOPE. WRONG GATE, KITTYCAT.

IN THAT GETUP, THERE'S NO WAY YOU'RE MILITARY. SO THERE'S NO WAY YOU'RE GETTING THROUGH HERE.

...

BETCHA A MONTH'S PAY YOU'RE WRONG, TROOPER.

DEET

OH, HEY, LOOK AT THAT.

PRETTY SURE THIS MEANS I CAN USE YOU AS A PRACTICE TARGET AND GET AWAY WITH IT AND DUMP WHAT'S LEFT IN THE NEAREST TRASH RECYCLER.

FORGED
PRIORITY ACCESS

UH YES MA'AM VERY SORRY MA'AM NO OFFENSE INTEND--

JUST OPEN THE FUCKIN' DOOR, WETWICK.

I'LL TAKE THAT MONTH'S PAY IN BEER. BETTER BE WAITING FOR ME BACK IN THE BARRACKS OR I'LL STAMP ON YOU UNTIL I CAN USE YOU AS GUN OIL.

...YES MA'AM.

--OND SHIFT TO RANGE 105 RED, SECOND SHIFT TO RANGE 105 RED FOR SCHEDULED FIRING TIME--

--CKER 623 AUDIT IN PROGRESS. PERSONNEL SHOULD USE ARMORY LOCKER 3091 UNTIL FURTHER--

ALERT. MAINTENANCE TO EXPERIMENTAL RANGE 870-Z. WEAPONS MALFUNCTION.

ALERT. MEDICAL CREW TO EXPERIMENTAL RANGE 870-Z FOR WET CLEANUP.

WATCH YOUR SIX, FORGED!

!

SAW YOUR SCORES POSTED ON THE LOCAL FEED, KID. TRAUMATIZING THE LOCALS AGAIN, I SEE.

BOSS WANTS ME TO ROUND UP THE TEAM, BUT I WANTED A WORD FIRST.

SIT DOWN.

?

HEH, YEAH, PUSHER HAD A NEW ARM GROWN AND READY FOR THE MEDBAY TECHS.

TOLD ME I NEED ONE MORE LIMB REPLACEMENT AND I WIN A SET OF CRYSTAL DECANTERS.

CHUK

IF YOU'LL FORGIVE THE INTRUSION, MAY I HAVE A MOMENT?

I'M WARRANT OFFICER RILEY CAMMINO, AND I WAS THIS SHIFT'S RANGE COMMANDER.

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU, CAMMINO?

WELL, BEGGING YOUR PARDON, BUT I'VE BEEN A RANGE SAFETY OFFICER ON THIS POST FOR THE BETTER PART OF TWO YEARS.

SAW SOME ACTION IN THE KOTA BELTER UPRISING, COUPLE OTHER PLACES.

BUT, MA'AM, WATCHING YOU WORK TODAY WAS THE FINEST DISPLAY OF MARKSMANSHIP I'VE EVER HAD THE PLEASURE TO WITNESS.

I WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO SHAKE YOUR HAND.

HARPO, SHAKE THE NICE WARRANT OFFICER'S HAND.

THANK YOU. HOPE WE SEE YOU AROUND HERE AGAIN SOON.

...

SMOOTH, KID.

SHE SEEMS NICE.

AND I GUESS SHE'S WHAT I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.

YOU'RE SWEET ON HER.

I WAS GOING TO ASK WHY YOU WERE SHOOTING HERE, SINCE YOU LIKE THE FORGED-ONLY RANGES OUT IN ZONE C BETTER.

NOW I KNOW. SHE'S CUTE AS A BUG.

LOOK, YOU KNOW ME. IF I LIKE SOMEONE, I PIN 'EM TO THE NEAREST FLAT SURFACE AND HAVE MY WICKED WAY WITH 'EM UNTIL THEY NEED A PELVIS REPLACEMENT.

BUT I KNOW YOU, TOO, AND THAT'S NOT YOUR WAY.

SO I'LL SAY THIS: I LOVE ALL OF MY TEAMMATES, AND I RESPECT THEM. YOU'RE ALL TOUGH, YOU'RE ALL SMART, YOU'RE ALL GREAT AT THE JOB.

BUT, AND I TRULY MEAN THIS:

YOU'RE THE BEST--THE PUREST--OF US, HARPO.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE SEEN AND DONE, AND YOU'RE STILL GOOD AT HEART, AND I LOVE YOU FOR IT.

IF WARRANT OFFICER CAMMINO HAS HALF A BRAIN IN HER HEAD, SHE'LL SEE HOW SPECIAL YOU ARE, TOO.

BE YOU, HARPO. BE BRAVE.

GIVE HER A CHANCE AND SEE IF THERE'S SOMETHING THERE.

...OH NO, I KNOW ALL THAT...

...I WAS UP ALL NIGHT READING ABOUT YOU...

...THE FORGED I MEAN, NOT YOU SPECIFICALLY, MY VICTORY.

THAT'S NOT TRUE, I HAD MY HANDMAIDENS READ IT TO ME, IT'S MORE EFFICIENT THAT WAY.

MY "VICTORY." SUCH A WONDERFUL NAME.

BUT RATHER BOLD, DON'T YOU THINK?

MAJESTY?

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU'RE EVER DEFEATED? YOU WILL HAVE TARNISHED OUR IMPERIAL NAME.

DEFEAT WOULD MEAN **DEATH,** MY ETERNAL.

YOU SPEAK FOR YOURSELF?

I SPEAK FOR ALL FORGED.

THAT IS EVEN ***BOLDER.***

BUT IT IS THE TRUTH.

PROVE IT.

GUARDS!

MY ETERNAL?

COME IN, ALL OF YOU.

THIS IS THE *IMPERIAL CLOSE*, VICTORY.

EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM ***SWORN*** TO OUR SERVICE, TO PROTECT OURSELVES WITH THEIR LIVES.

THEY ARE THE ***FINEST*** SOLDIERS OF THE EMPIRE, DEVOTED TO OUR SAFETY.

FIGHT THEM.

I'M SORRY ABOUT THIS.

WE ANSWER TO OUR DUTY, FORGED.

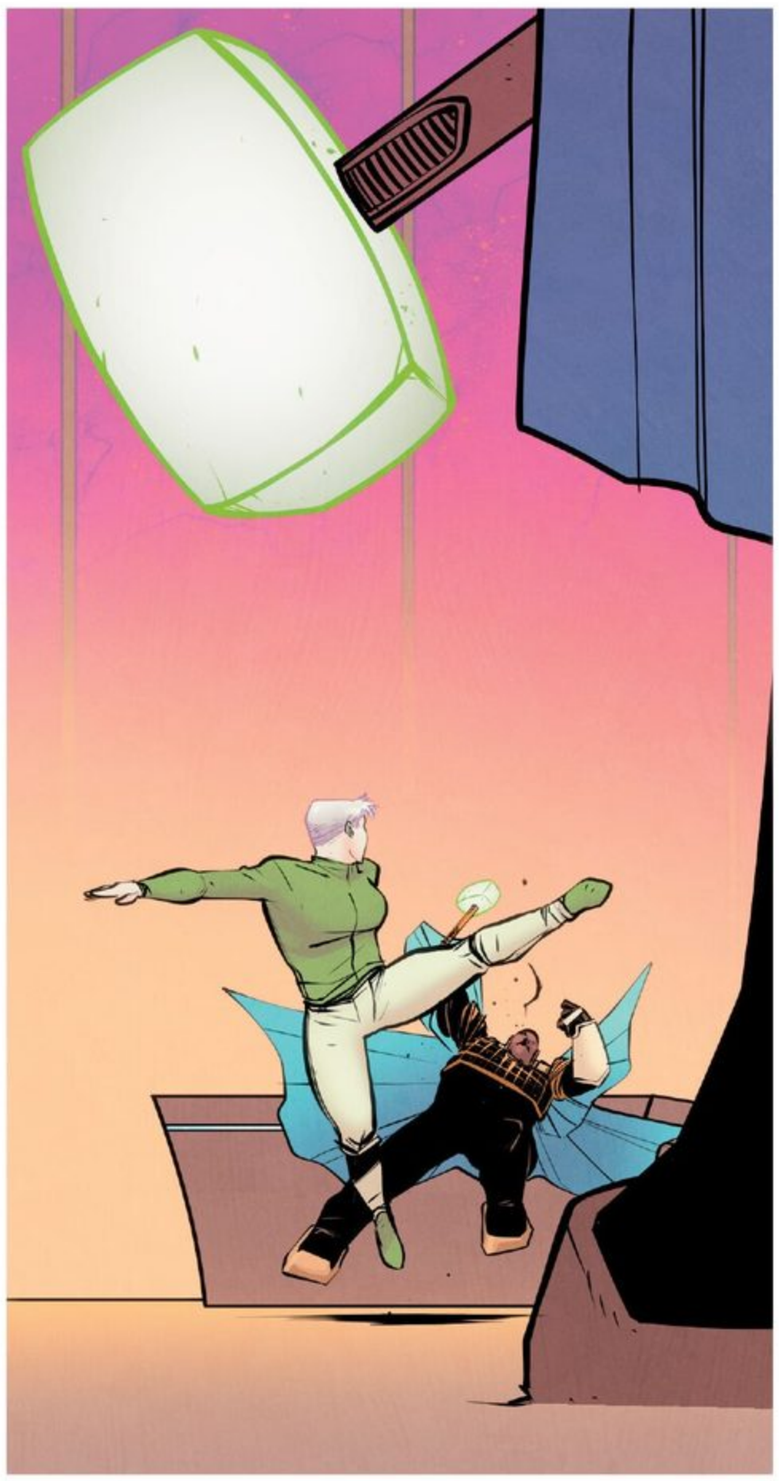
THAT WE DO, PRIME RAB.

HER MAJESTY WANTS A *SHOW.*

THEN I SUPPOSE WE'D BEST GIVE HER ONE.

I SUPPOSE SO.

WHAMMM



NO NO
NO--

--YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG!

I SAID, "FIGHT *THEM*," NOT "FIGHT *HER*."

ALL OF MY GUARDS. *ALL* OF THEM. *AT* ONCE.

FOR *REAL*, NOT FOR *SHOW*.

BUT MY ETERNAL--

FINE.

KA-RACK

THE MORE THE MERRIER.

WE DO NOT DARE PULL OUR BLOWS.

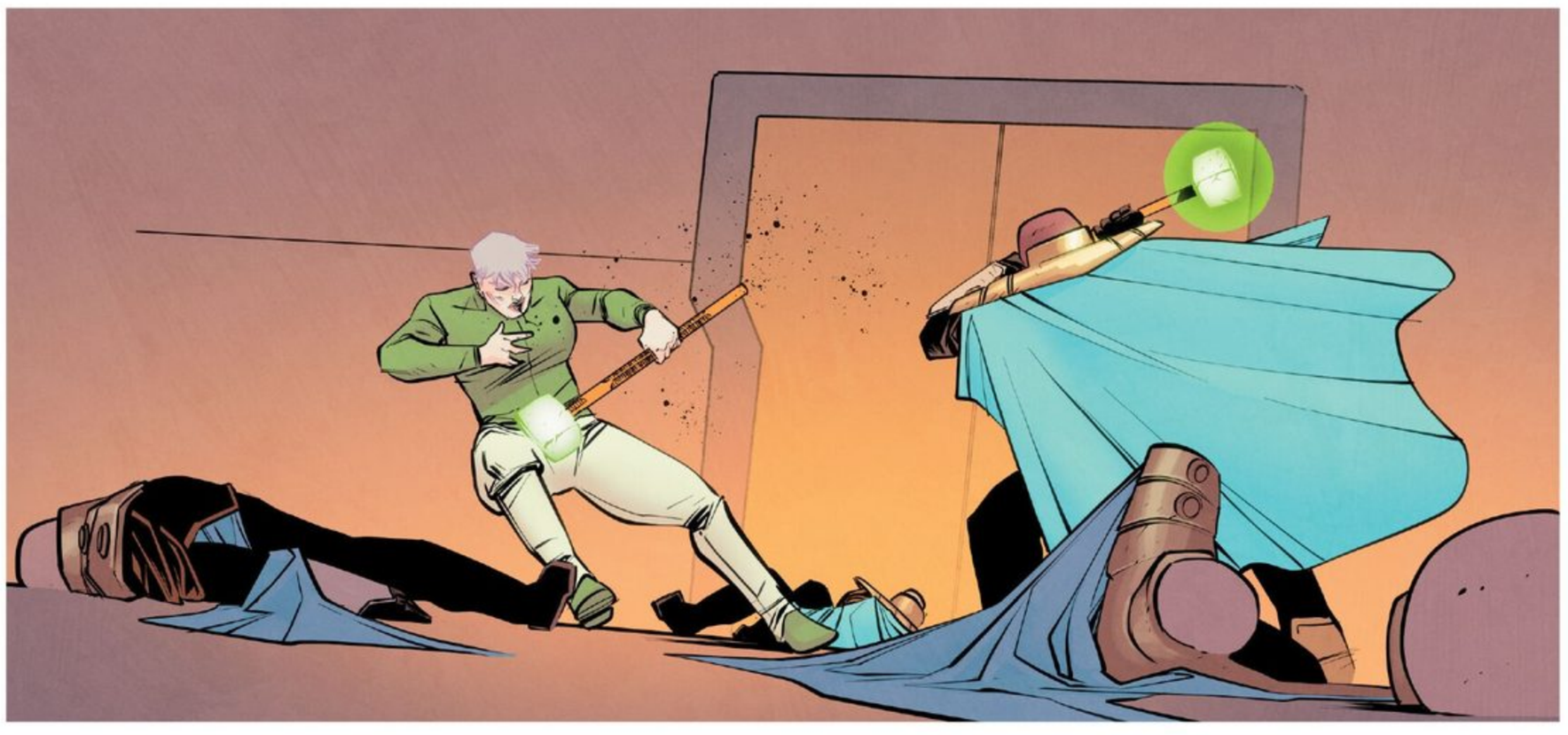
IT WOULD MEAN OUR LIFE.

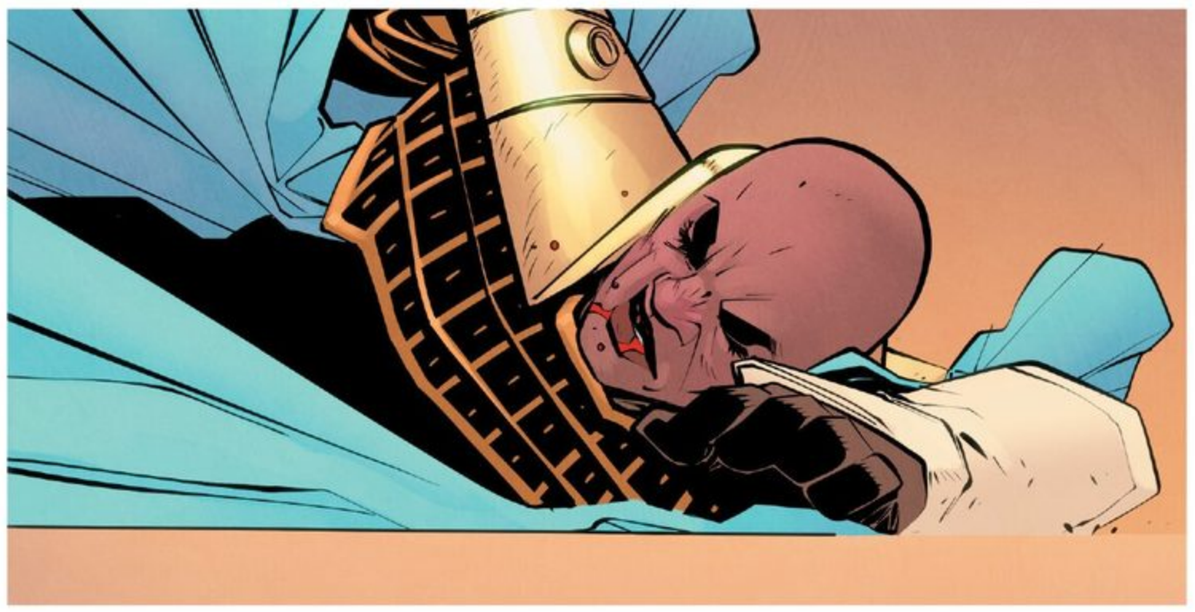
IT MAY ALSO MEAN YOURS.

DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO, NICIENZA.

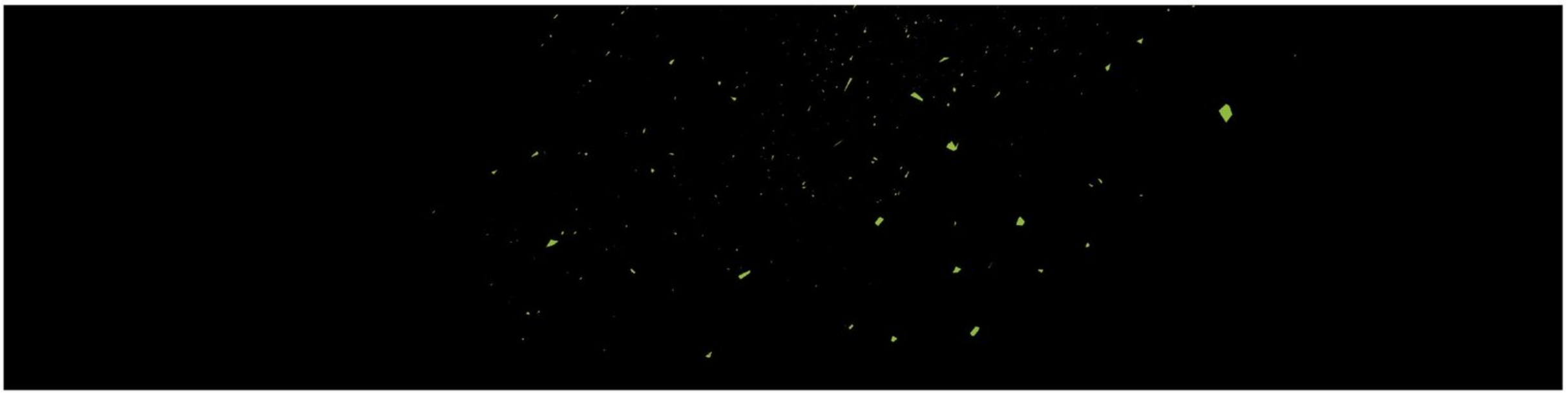
I WILL, TOO.

...WOW.





YES
YES DO
IT!



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

FINISH HER!

MAJESTY? I AM ONLY FOLLOWING YOUR ORDERS.

YOU BID ME FIGHT THEM.

I HAVE DONE.

I TRUST YOUR MAJESTY IS PLEASED?

THAT WAS ASTONISHING!

YOU'RE STILL BLEEDING! I THINK I HEARD **BONES** BREAKING! HOW DID YOU DO THAT THING WITH YOUR **ELBOW?** DID IT **HURT?**

CAN **ALL** OF YOU DO THAT?

OH--OH **VICTORY!**

YOU DO **NOT** DISAPPOINT YOUR NAME!

I WANT TO KNOW **MORE**, TELL ME OF **ALL** YOUR **ADVENTURES--**

--NO DON'T WORRY ABOUT **THEM**, THEY'LL BE SEEN TO--

--OR REPLACED--

--LET ME SHOW YOU THE **BATHS...**

HELIX ACADROME AND UNIVERSITY
THRONEWORLD–B2

NO, NOW THAT DOESN'T ACCOUNT FOR THE CHROMODYNAMISM, DAMMIT--

--PROFESSOR?

PROFESSOR SADAMA!

HEY! HEY!

PROFESSOR SADAMA!

HEY BIGBRAIN!

EXCUSE ME? ARE YOU SPEAKING TO ME?

PROFESSOR ROGET SADAMA, RIGHT?

YES. WHAT? MAY I HELP...

...OH...

...OH, YES, INDEED, I RECOGNIZE *YOU.*

YOU'RE THE YOUNG LADY WHO RUINED PROFESSOR QUINSE-MOY'S LECTURE ON QUASIPARTICLE REPATRIATION IN RAPID FABRICATION LATTICING LAST NIGHT.

I'M SORRY, WHAT WAS THAT?

I SAID PROFESSOR QUINSE-MOY FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR DEGRADATION IN Q-TUNNELING INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

WHICH WOULD LEAD TO PARTICLE SEPARATION--

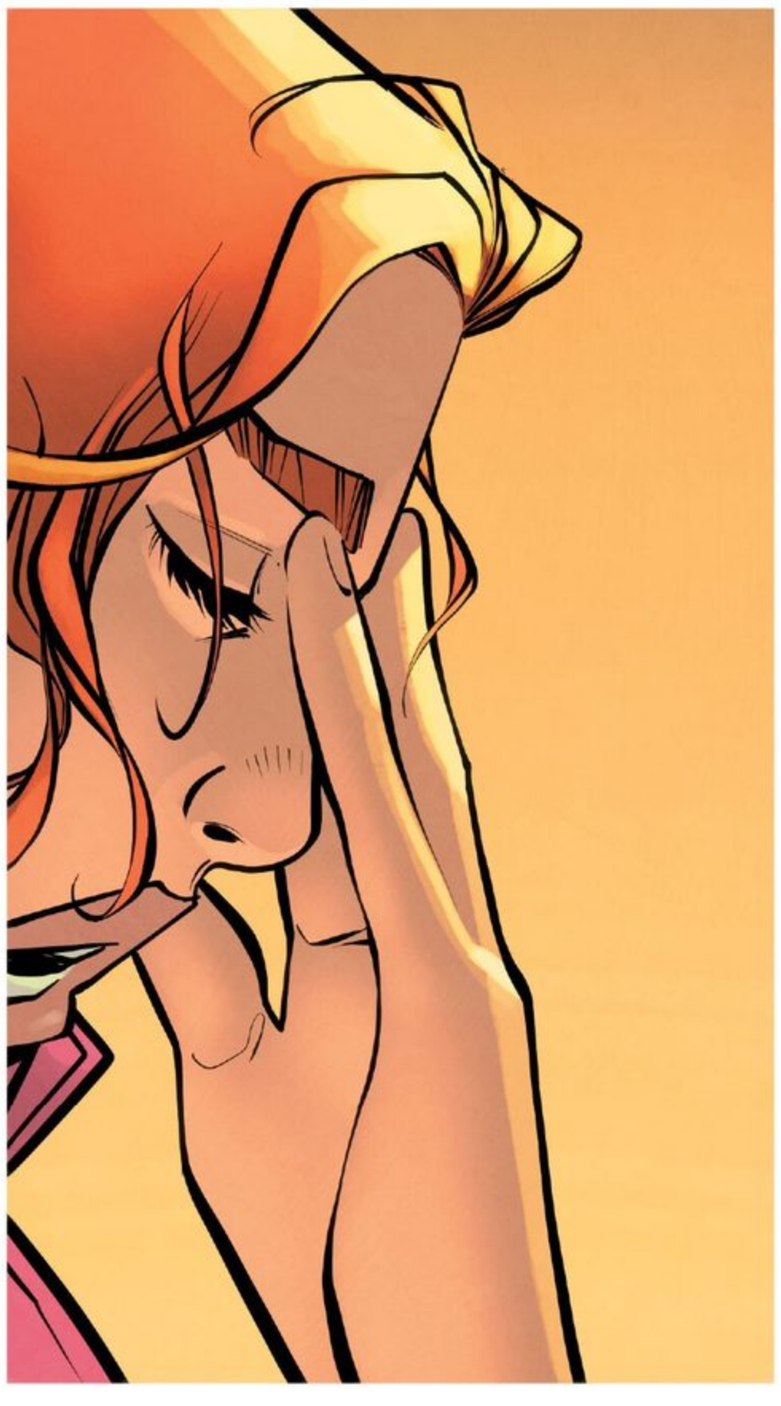
--AND COMPLETE FUNCTION COLLAPSE...

...YES, INDEED. YES, I SEE.

I'M SORRY, I DIDN'T CATCH YOUR NAME.
I'M UH YOU UH CAN UH CALL UH ME UH HAP.
HAP?
HAP.
STRANGE NAME.

IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH, HAP?
OH, ABSOLUTELY, ANYTIME.

NO.
I MEAN YES.
I MEAN I WAS HOPING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH T-SPACE INTERSTITIALS IF YOU'VE GOT THE TIME BUT IF YOU DON'T OKAY REALLY I WAS JUST HOPING TO CATCH YOU AT A FREE MOMENT IS THIS GOOD?



I SEE.

WELL, YOU'RE FREE TO VISIT ME DURING OFFICE HOURS. THEY'RE OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS, EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT IN ONE OF MY CLASSES.

NO, I'M NOT A STUDENT.

YOU'RE NOT? I HAD JUST ASSUMED, BECAUSE OF THE LECTURE YESTERDAY--

NO, I'M, UH...I'M WITH THE MILITARY, ACTUALLY.

OH. INDEED? AND YOU WANTED TO, AH, ***CONSULT*** WITH ME?

VERY MUCH.

ABOUT...T-SPACE INTERSTITIALS.

AMONGST OTHER THINGS.

IF YOU HAVE THE TIME.

I AM ALWAYS HAPPY TO MAKE TIME FOR OUR ETERNAL'S BRAVE SOLDIERS.

I WAS ON MY WAY TO MY OFFICE, IF YOU'D LIKE TO CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION THERE?

SO YOU'RE A COMBAT ENGINEER, THEN?

YEAH, YOU COULD...

...YOU COULD SAY THAT....

MILITARY ORBITAL FACILITY L51-D ("THE CASTRA")

ZONE G, SPRAWL 003-H, IMPERIAL MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX

--GET THAT DAMN THING OUTTA STASIS, *STAT.*

WE'RE RACING TISSUE REJECTION, PEOPLE.

EMERGENCY SURGICAL SUITE 10-42

GOT IT. SUSPENSION GEL PURGING.

--WISH TO HELL WE COULD HIT THIS GUY WITH SOME KEFLIMAXIN TO SCRUB OUT THE CHANCES OF REJECTION. I *HATE* THESE ALLERGY CASES.

TRAUMA FROM THE CRASH AND THIS GRUNT'S KEFLIMAXIN RESISTANCE MEANS HE'LL STROKE OUT IF WE DOSE HIM.

WE DO THIS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY: SCALPELS AND SUTURES...

...AND SO, AND SO, AND SUCH, AND THUS... AND WE'RE THERE.

CIRCULATION LOOKS GOOD, NO LEAKS ALONG THE SUTURE LINE. GOOD JOB, DOCTOR.

LOOKS LIKE THE SARGE HERE WON'T HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO SHOOT LEFTY.

ALWAYS LIKE WATCHING YOU WORK, PUSHER. OLD-SCHOOL.

ANYTIME, DOC.

TRAUMA RESPONSE TEAM TO LANDING PAD 521-B. CODE ORANGE.

I HAVE TO ASK--YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH FIELD SURGERY AND ADDITIONAL TRAINING YOU COULD RUN THIS PLACE WITH ONE HAND TIED BEHIND YOUR BACK.

WHY THE HELL DO YOU SPEND HALF YOUR LEAVE RIPPED TO THE NIPPLES ON RECREATIONAL PHARMA, AND THE OTHER HALF DOING PICK-UP TRAUMA SURGERY?

HA!

YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME IF I TOLD YOU.

TRY ME, PUSH.

PRACTICE.

--DR. MOROVIK TO RECOVERY BAY 7-B. MOROVIK TO REC--

SOME PEOPLE SAY US CLONES DON'T DREAM, DOC. DID YOU KNOW THAT?

IT'S BULLSHIT. WE ***DREAM.***

I HAVE ***ONE*** DREAM, AND I HAVE IT ***ALL THE TIME.***

IT'S A TERRIBLE

NNF TALK ABOUT YOUR SORE NECKS

DREAM, AND I HATE IT.

IT'S A MEMORY I HAVE FROM WAY BACK DURING THE ***PROST INSURRECTION.*** SOME FUCK-HEAD BUILT AN IED WITH A TIMING DEVICE AND PLANNED TO BLOW UP THE CITY CENTER.

TIMER CLICKED AS IT COUNTED DOWN. NEVER FORGOT THAT NOISE.

CLICK CLICK CLICK.

--CLEANUP TEAM TO INFECTIOUS MATERIALS LAB, 42-13-C, BIOHAZARD SPILL--

IN THE DREAM, ALL I CAN SEE IS THAT TIMER, CLICKING AND COUNTING DOWN.

BUT IT GETS FASTER AND ***FASTER.*** TIMER DOESN'T COUNT DOWN IN ORDER. IT'S ALL ***FUCKED,*** AND I'M RUNNING OUT OF TIME.

NO SECRET WHAT IT MEANS. A FIRST-YEAR PSYCH INTERN COULD TELL YOU ***THAT.***

IN THE FIELD, I'M THE ONE WHO KEEPS EVERYONE ALIVE AND IN THE FIGHT. WITHOUT ME, ANY ONE OF MY TEAM COULD END UP BLEEDING OUT ON ALIEN SOIL.

AND THE LAW OF AVERAGES SAYS AT SOME POINT, ONE--MAYBE ALL--OF THEM WILL.

SO I ***PRACTICE.*** I BALANCE OUT THE COMBAT TRAUMA BY ALTERING MY BRAIN CHEMISTRY WITH FUN DRUGS, AND THEN I SOBER UP AND ***WORK.***

KEEPS ME SANE.

EMPRESS ETERNAL, PUSH. THAT'S...A ***LOT*** TO CARRY AROUND.

IT'S THE JOB, DOC.

IT'S ***MY*** JOB.

GOTTA KEEP TRAINING IF I'M GONNA OUTRACE THE REAPER.

SERIOUSLY, PUSH. YOU NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE--

FS3-EPSILON, YOU ARE ORDERED TO RETURN TO BARRACKS. FS3-EPSILON, YOU ARE--

THEY'RE PLAYING MY SONG, DOC.

YOU DO GOOD WORK, PUSHER. YOU EVER GET TIRED OF CARRYING ALL THAT WEIGHT IN THE FIELD, YOU'VE GOT A SPOT HERE.

THANKS, DOC.

SEE YOU AROUND.

--TRAUMA RESPONSE TEAM, REPORT IN, STATION 3-17, TRAUMA RESPONSE--

ADJUST SEVEN-POINT-TWO COUNTER-LEK.

SIMULATED GRAVITY IS SET 7.8-G STANDARD.

ATMOSPHERIC, BAROMETRIC PRESSURE 3,108 M-BAR ABSOLUTE.

WINDS GUSTING INTERMITTENT, 93 TO 176 KAR.

MAGNETIC FIELD INDETERMINATE WITH PULSE.

07

08

ADJUST SEVEN-POINT-TWO COUNTER-LEK.

KA-RACCK

THWICK
THWICK

YOU'RE WELCOME.

JUST A SEC.

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MA'AM?

SURE, JUST SIGN YOURSELF OUT.

NOT SURE IF YOU'LL BE BACK TOMORROW, BUT IF YOU WANT TO STORE YOUR WEAPON HERE, I CAN PUT IT IN LOCK-UP FOR YOU.

MY PLEASURE.

I AM CAPABLE OF PROVIDING VERBAL INTERACTION WITH WARRANT OFFICER CAMMINO, IF YOU...

...REQUIRE.

MESSAGE RECEIVED.

GOT THAT SQUARED AWAY...

...FIGURE YOU'LL BE USING IT AGAIN TOMORROW.

AT LEAST THIS WAY YOU DON'T HAVE TO LUG IT AROUND, RIGHT?

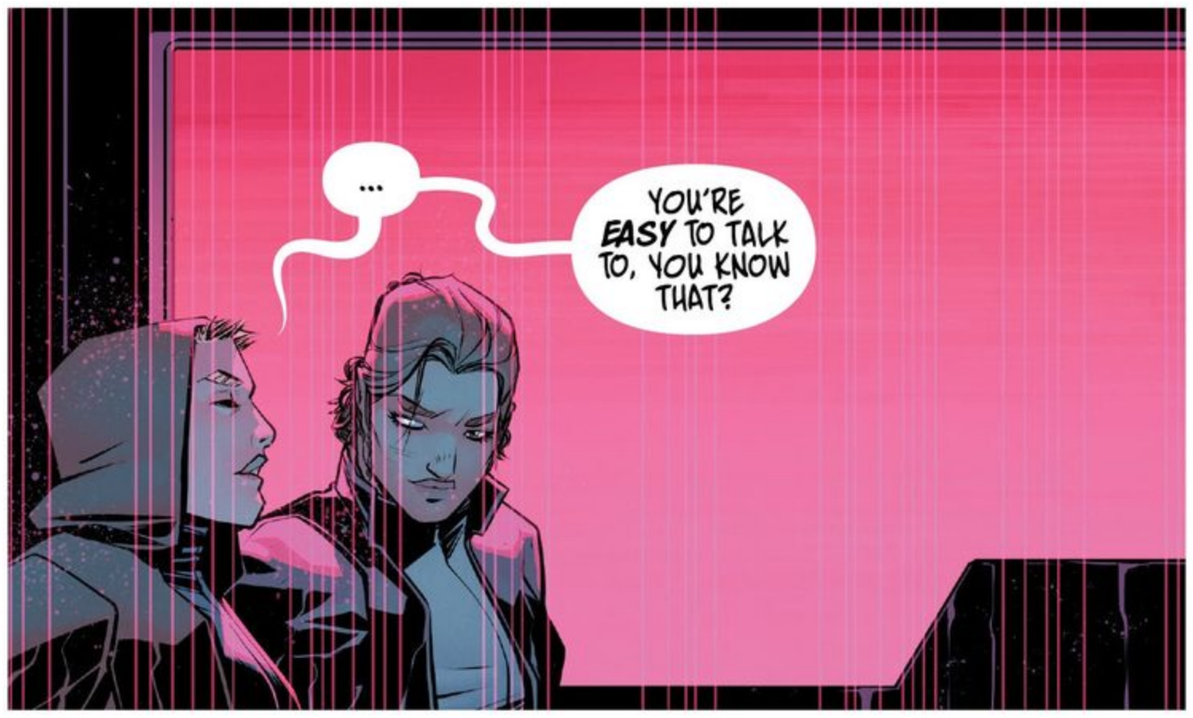
RIGHT, WELL, I'VE GOT TO LOCK UP FOR THE NIGHT--

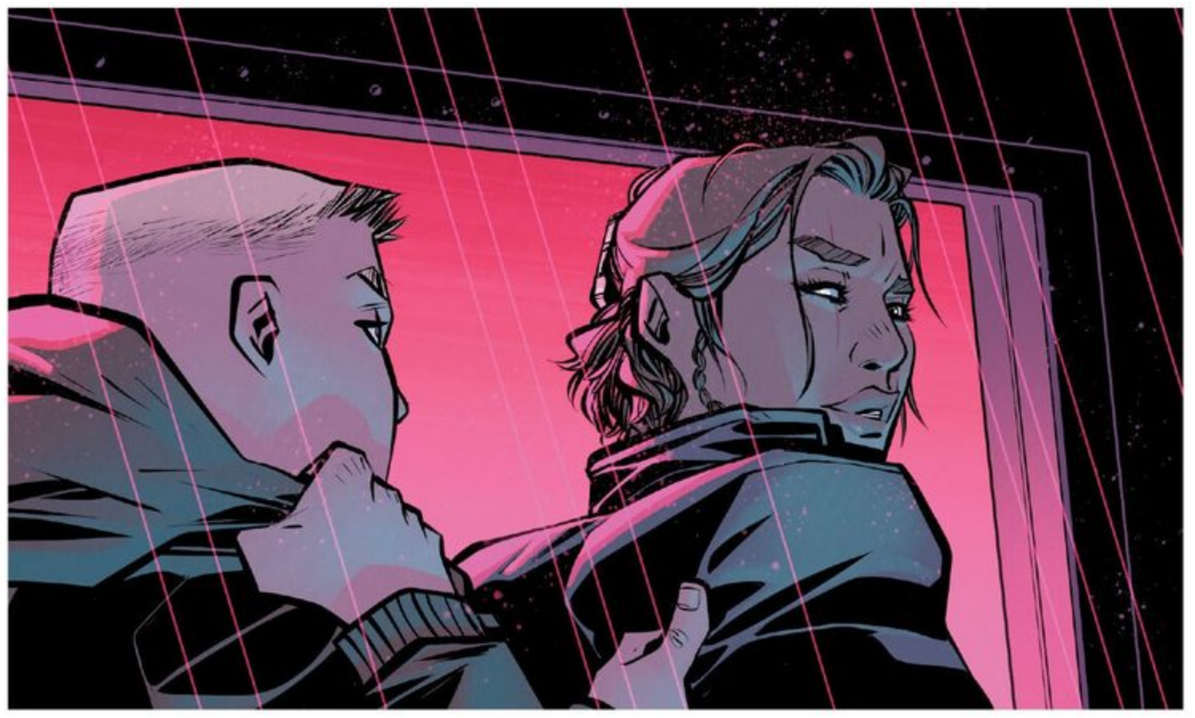
--SORRY, DID YOU NEED...?

I'D LOVE TO GET A DRINK.

LEMME GET MY COAT.

...IN THE COFI, BORDERING THE OMNICRON COLONIES.
DOUBLE TAP
BUT LIKE I TOLD YOU, THAT ENDED...BADLY. TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO REALIZE THAT WASN'T MY FAULT, YOU KNOW?
SO I ROTATED BACK HERE, FIGURE I'LL REDEPLOY NEXT CYCLE, ONE OF THE OUTER FORTRESS POSTINGS.


...
YOU'RE EASY TO TALK TO, YOU KNOW THAT?



SORRY, IF THAT WAS--

OKAY, SO, SUDDENLY I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO GO BACK TO BARRACKS.

WE CAN GET A ROOM. DO YOU WANT TO GET A ROOM? I'D LIKE TO GET A ROOM.

WARNING: MAGNETIC WAVE FLUCTUATIONS DETECTED--

--GAUSS SIGNA--

BOOM

HER ETERNAL MAJESTY'S THRONEWORLD PRIME

INCLUDING ORBITAL INSTALLATIONS

- DEFENSE STATIONS AND PLATFORMS
- NAVAL DOCKS AND TRANSIENT MILITARY HUBS
- PLANETARY OPERATIONS STATIONS (WEATHER OBSERVATION, TRAFFIC CONTROL)
- MILITARY HOUSING AND RESUPPLY DEPOTS
- CIVILIAN/CORPORATE STATIONS

PLANET: Throneworld Prime
CLASS: Alpha
SECTOR: Zero (00.00.00.00)
ENVIRONMENT: Terraformed and Engineered Urban
SECURITY LEVEL: Imperial-Alpha (maximum military presence)
POPULATION: 1.6 billion

LS1-0
(THE CASTRA)

BRIEFING: THE CASTRA

Indoctrination Document 77R-41. Prepared by the Internal Communications Office of the Imperial Bureau of Data Collection and Analysis

MILITARY ORBITAL FACILITY L51-D (nicknamed "The Castra") is the key military station in orbit around Throneworld Prime. The massive station houses more than seven million personnel; roughly one-third of them are permanent military and civilian contractor residents, with the rest transient soldiers and starmen. Though all branches of the Imperial military operate at the station, it is under the authority of the Imperial Navy.

Permanent residence on Throneworld Prime is prohibited to military personnel (most especially infantry and elite units such as Forged teams), save those directly charged with the protection of Her Eternal Highness. Security and law enforcement teams on the surface of the planet typically maintain residences on the Castra.

In addition to housing of Imperial soldiers and starmen, L51-D provides a wide array of support services: cutting-edge medical facilities and clinics, training grounds, marksmanship ranges, educational and entertainment venues, Post Exchange shops, commissaries, leisurezones (ranging from family-friendly activities to more adult forms of entertainment), temples and chapels, and so forth. The Castra is literally a sprawling city floating in space.

The station is broken into sprawls: prefabricated, modular structures that can be almost infinitely reconfigured to suit ever-changing needs. Each sprawl contains numerous districts, subdivided into various zones. The resemblance to a city is enhanced by the zones possessing a wide variety of "outdoor" spaces: parks, arboretums, wide thoroughfares for ground-based transport, and vast open-air environments that allow for the operation of high-speed aircraft and hover vehicles.

In addition, L51-D is supported by a ring of smaller facilities that orbit Throneworld Prime, accessible by transport shuttles. Shipyards, fleet tenders, additional barracks, the Imperial Observatory, the Naval College of T-Space Navigation, all operate under the authority of L51-D's command.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

T-11 Proving Station. A testing facility located on the outer shell of Sprawl 11, with docking rings and airlocks, allowing military scientists to test new weapons systems in controlled terrestrial and open-space environments. T-11 is also home to Unit 94, codenamed "OnyxForge," a classified lab charged with the design and prototype fabrication of the next generation of Forged armor. Unit 94's existence is not known to the rank and file.

Imperial General-Use Military Firing Range 82-R. A marksmanship range for military personnel. In addition to pistol and rifle ranges, this location provides three Alpha Class long-distance ranges for high-powered armaments; shooters can test their skills on reactive and evasive targets from close-quarters distances to extreme long range. For an even greater challenge, shooters can engage targets placed outside the station, with firing occurring via shooting ports similar to airlocks.

Helix University Orbital Annex 1. A sister school to the Throneworld-based Helix Acadrome, Helix University offers extension courses to Her Majesty's soldiery, with emphasis placed on hard sciences, engineering, aerospace architecture, and military history. Entrance exams for Helix are notoriously difficult, often irreverently referred to as "brain thresher tests." The Imperial Bureau of Data Collection and Analysis pays special attention to the test results, and focuses personnel recruitment efforts on the highest-scoring applicants.

Imperial General-Use Military Firing Range 82-R.

Leisurezone T-50. Nicknamed "Fleshville," Leisurezone T-50 is a "red light district" closely regulated by Naval authorities. Leisurezones contain a wide variety of privately owned and run establishments that serve military personnel on the Castra. T-50 is home to an astonishing array of bars and restaurants, theaters where carnal exhibitions are performed live, screening rooms featuring pre-recorded features (with options for Full-Senses Neural Links for customers), and a wide range of licensed brothels which cater to all manner of individual desires. Leisurezones can be found throughout the Empire, but T-50 is widely viewed as the "best" of them all. [Note: The Bureau maintains a network of covert agents throughout this leisurezone, collecting evidence of various improprieties conducted by members of the Imperial civilian elite, who often find "legitimate" reasons to visit the Castra.] See appended file, "McGurk's Guide To Getting Wasted on the Castra" for more information.

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

ANOM. 918
>>ALERT
>>INTERCEPT

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

The following is an excerpt from "The McGurk Guide Series," an unofficial publication with irregular distribution, mostly downloaded via Permaweb link and shared widely amongst the enlisted personnel of Her Eternal Majesty's armed forces.

The series first appeared in 8,954 REM. Whether McGurk themself ever actually existed is open to much speculation—the surname is not uncommon within the bounds of the Empire—it is evident through even the most cursory examination that the work is the product of multiple authors over time, and frequently several writing at the same time from different outposts and bases of the Empire.

Views on the publication vary amongst military brass, who are of course aware of it. These views range from amused to annoyed and, in rare instances, outraged. Attempts to discover authorship and shut down the publication have occasionally been mounted by high-ranking officers for a variety of reasons, ranging from "detrimental effects on unit readiness" to "insubordinate and subversive attitudes and a disrespect for authority." While silenced on occasion, the series always returns.

McGURK'S GUIDE TO GETTING WASTED ON THE CASTRA

– 374TH EDITION –

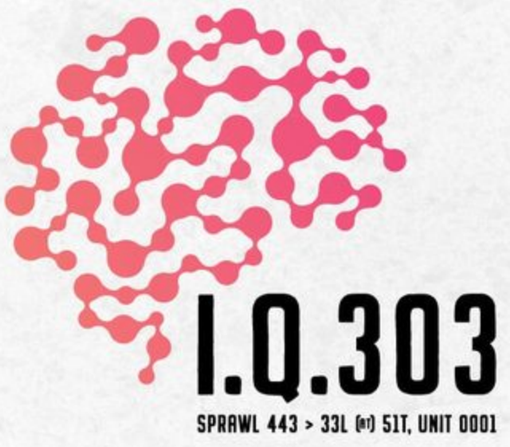
Hey ground-pounders and blast-bailers! Hey you grunts and groans, my family wearing the pennant and serving Her Eternal Glory! That's right, it's your old pal McGurk back with this, the latest revision to the delights and hidden gems of self-abuse and indulgence that can be found on the Castra! As always, this update is as correct as I can smack it at the time of going live, but ooh baby we all know shit changes faster than a green LT's shorts at snap inspection, so check your vectors and always verify your targets, and in case of gross inaccuracies and errors, remember: it's these establishments that got shit wrong, ***not*** your tried-and-true buddy McGurk.

IQ.303

Sprawl 443, 33L @ 51T, Unit 0001

THE DIGS: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE BENNIES: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE DOUGH: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡

Nah, my maties, don't let the name send you running back to basic or thinking you gotta hit the terminals and brush up on your astrophysics and trig calcs. This isn't some brainbox or virtual mindscape maze or any of that shit; it is, in fact, the exact opposite—hit IQ.303 when you're looking to ***unhook***, my friends. This is the place you go when you're back from an eighteen-month deployment aboard a metal brick surrounded by the cold, unforgiving, smells-like-Gran's-used-socks where you've been trapped 26/7 shoulder to shoulder with 12,000 of your closest friends and you ***fucking need to get away from it all for a reasonable price.***



There's one—count it again—***one*** human being running the place at any given time, though IQ.303 never closes. You hit the desk, you run your chip, you get your key and a number, and you get a pod all to yourself. ***Everything*** is automated from that point on, you don't have to see another godsdamned ***soul*** you don't want to. Pods are available in single, double, and party—depending on your fancy, though I recommend single for the above-mentioned reasons. Terminal access allows customization of furnishings and full environmental controls, and the virtual settings are ***extensive***. Looking to hang on the beaches of Corly? In an aurora? With the scent of fresh versperleaf? Want a little relaxant pumped in with that sweet sea breeze, or maybe something a little more psychedelic? Want white noise and the steady heartbeats of a pack of puppies lulling you to sleep? Yeah, you can get that, too.

And I'll say it again—you don't have to interact with a single other bio, not one. Anything you need, it's a button press away.

Pods are sound-proofed, and each is cleaned and sterilized between occupants.

There are better ways to decompress, sure, but when you want some blessed ***me time***, this is McGurk's first stop.

Waj's House of Mayhem
Sprawl 71, 908A @ 2-7

THE DIGS: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE BENNIES: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE DOUGH: ⬡⬡⬡⬡

We all know the types—hell, you may ***be*** the type—who have learned the military doctrine that there is no problem that cannot be vanquished with enough firepower. Happiness, they say, is a warm gauss rifle. (And if it's warm you may want to set it down and back away right away, hear me?) For those of you tired of laying down fire on an authorized range under the critical eye of some tight-assed rangemaster who won't shut up about how much better things were ***back in the good old days***, here's your alternative. McGurk rocks to those joints that believe in truth in advertising, and Waj delivers.

The selection of weapons for rent is extensive, everything from top-of-the-line near-military-grade energy weapons to classic slugthrowers, with range selection choices to please the most discerning—or violent—tastes. Virtual target environments can be tailored with a push of a button, ranging from individual target scenarios to full-on planetary subjugation.

Waj also offers the ever-popular "Most Dangerous Game" parties, available by reservation, if you're looking to hook up with say, dunno, fifteen, twenty of your besties and see which of you can murder the rest of you (virtually, of course!) and come out on top. For those stationed on the Castra more permanently, there's even organized league play with teams by local businesses.

Mousedeath Brainpain
Sprawl 100, 620 @ 60R, 4100

THE DIGS: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE BENNIES: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE DOUGH: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡

This is a new establishment, only open for about a month at the time of publication. Owned and operated by a retired Marine Upper Sec named Darkfinkel, it's a hole-in-the-wall bar and grill with a twist—everything here is made and served by motherfucking ***human beings***.

Yeah, I'll say that again—nothing here is automated, synthicated, modal-created, or perpetuated.

Gets better—or worse, depending on your bent—because Darkfinkel does ***not*** allow personal electronics on site. You walk in with your PDA, you're asked to check it in the lockbox and given a goddamn ***paper receipt*** for it. You refuse, you're asked politely to leave. You refuse, Darkfinkel will ***make sure you do.***

And baby, trust me when I say this cat's got some creche in them, because when you are removed from the premises, you fucking well ***stay removed***.

Why, you may ask, should you put up with such an inconvenience as having to set down your precious comp or disconnect that earsong you're clipping?

Because the food is unbelievable, the drinks are outstanding ***and*** strong, and you can hear yourself think. Live music most nights, the waitstaff is personable and pleasant and—look, I gotta call it like I see it—maybe the ***hottest on the Castra***, and the vibe is just unbelievable. Open's mid-Afternoon Watch through Last Wolfwatch, and coming up on closing it is the best place to end your night out if you're looking to wind it down easily and fill your belly and blood with the good stuff.

And no, I've no fucking clue why Darkfinkel named the place Mousedeath Brainpain. Every time I ask, they just smile this scary-ass smile and ask me if I'd like another drink.

Some questions, you know, they're better off unanswered, amirite?

The Insatiable Gorilla
Sprawl 71, 41T @ 467 N

THE DIGS: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE BENNIES: ⬡⬡⬡⬡⬡
THE DOUGH: ⬡⬡⬡⬡

So Sprawl 71 is fucking epic as far as leisurezones go, and it's rough enough that Shore Patrol doesn't go down there alone, so let's get that out of the way here and now. You walk the block, you're gonna take your chances.

But my friends, we all know how it is, right? It gets lonely on deployment, I know. Hell, it gets lonely ***back*** from deployment. Sometimes, you just want to go someplace where you can get a little companionship, of the flavor that best appeals in the moment. Sometimes, you just want to look into a pair of soulful, understanding eyes and feel strong, safe arms around you, and hear someone whispering in your ear that they ***get it***, and it's all gonna be

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all right as you feel that surprisingly soft fur brush so gently against your flesh.

And sometimes you gotta get your full freak on, get shitfaced, howl at the moons, and piston-ride the pleasure pillar to terminal velocity so you're feeling it into the next week. Sometimes you want that ***a lot***. Like the girl says, sometimes you're willing to pay for the pelvis replacement.

I don't judge. McGurk wants you to live your best life, so you go and be you, read me?

So, yeah, this joint has a certain notoriety, not just for the leisure-service-workers available (all of whom, I add, have been certified and bonded—you may catch ***something*** at the Gorilla, but it absolutely will ***not*** be from any of the employees, this is what I'm saying), but due to it having been frequented by the Forged in the past. Now, now, don't let that scare you off—they're just like you and me, giving heart and soul for Her Eternal's Glory. But be advised, if one of those fine, ***fine*** ladies is looking to ride to Destination: Pleasure, you might be best served to come back another night.

Or, hells, maybe you'll get lucky and she'll let you buy a ticket yourself.

Or unlucky, for that matter.

Drinks are potent, food is serviceable, beds are available in a variety of sizes; playrooms by reservation only, and a deposit and signed waiver is required if contracting with any of the gorillas.

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

TO YOUR STATION!

A Typical Shipboard Day for an Imperial Starman

Excerpt from Training Manual IN-004291937 (Unclassified)

GREETINGS, STARMAN. You are about to embark on glorious shipboard duty in service to the Forever Exalted Empress. Naval service is a pathway to adventure, to advancement, and the opportunity to serve a higher calling. Good fortune and clear skies!

You have completed basic training and indoctrination, and are well-schooled in the basics of military service: ranks, regulations, and a general understanding of one's duties. In addition to upholding the highest traditions of military service, you will have also completed initial courses in your Field of Specialty (FOS). Be it gunnery, maintenance, medical, sanitation, or propulsion systems, there are no tasks aboard ship that are unimportant.

Imperial spacecraft are intricate and complicated systems, and even the smallest part is vital in keeping the day-to-day machinery of the Navy operating at peak efficiency. There are no humble duties, only humble servants of a higher calling.

RATING AND RANK

As a new Starman, your rating indicates your general area of specialty—bosun's mate, space traffic controller's mate, machinist's mate, and so forth—which should not be confused with rank. (Rank determines your place in the chain of command and pay grade.)

Ratings are divided into five categories, and lower pay grades are, like you, considered to be in training/apprenticeship. You may hear the slang term "null" or "undies" in reference to your undesignated status; this is normal and should not dissuade you from striving to advance your training and abilities and thus attain a higher rating and rank. Rating categories are: **Space Operations** (notably for fighters and support craft carried as part of a starship's loadout); **Construction/Maintenance**; **Medical**; **Gunnery**; and **Deck Crew/Starman**.

Some example ratings include:

Space Ops Bosun's Mate. Responsible for operation of launch and recovery gear for support craft and fighters, oil and lubricant transfer systems, the directing of craft on decks and hangar bays, and so forth.

Space Traffic Controller. Responsible for the speedy flow of vehicle traffic in and around a starship, including the operation of nav beacons, hazard location and identification, hangar illumination systems, and the relay of necessary information to pilots.

Space Ops Machinist's Mate. Assistants to spaceflight mechanics and engineers. Often required to undertake major systems replacements (i.e. installing new engines in a shuttle) and general spacecraft maintenance.

Space Ops Ordnanceman. These ratings operate/handle armaments carried on support craft—missile and energy weapons systems—as well as perform maintenance on such systems.

Construction Technician. Con-techs conduct maintenance, repair, and construction of a starship's internal physical structure (from bulkheads to airlocks), as well as conduct planetside construction duties (such as building temporary or permanent ground bases, landing pads, and so on).

Construction Electrician. Con-els provide power infrastructure to internal spaces aboard ship.

Equipment Operator. E-ops (or "quips") work service vehicles (such as load-lifters and null-g cranes).

Utilities Operations. U-ops are responsible for internal life support systems, which include air, gravity, internal fluid sanitation systems, and so on.

Medical Corpsman. Corpsmen are medical professionals who are responsible for healthcare services to a ship's crew. This includes pharmacy techs, aides to medical officers of various types, and battlefield medics.

Bosun's Mate. Among various training duties—including

the reinforcement of basic spacemanship skills among the crew—they are part of the standard Deck Watch teams.

Gunner's Mate. Gunner's mates operate and maintain a ship's weapons systems, and test various ordnance types.

Information Systems Technician. IS-techs design, install, and operate shipboard computer and encrypted internal communications systems.

Damage Control Technician. Tasked with emergency repairs, maintenance and operation of ship stability systems, fire-fighting, and defensive systems against chemical, biological, and energy attacks.

Engineman. Enginemen operate and maintain ship's propulsion systems (including normal-space engines and T-space engines).

Hull Maintenance Technician. H-ops (also called "hops" or "hell-ops") are tasked with the physical integrity of a starship's outer hull, as well as internal conduits and piping housed directly below a ship's "hardshell" exterior.

SHIPBOARD TIME

Each starship's chronometer adheres to Imperial Standard Time—a 26-hour day (from 0000 to 2600), synched to the time zone of the Imperial Palace on Throneworld Prime. Each ship runs two clocks: the Imperial Standard, and a local clock used when a ship has achieved orbit; ship commanders select the local time zone as appropriate for their current mission.

Ship time is broken into increments called Watches.

- **Mid Watch** occurs from 0001–0500.
- **Day Watch** (or **Morning Watch**) runs from 0501–1000.
- **Forenoon Watch** runs from 1001–1200.
- **Afternoon Watch** runs from 1201–1700.
- **First Wolfwatch** occurs between 1701–1900.
- **Last Wolfwatch** runs from 1901–2100.
- **First Watch** runs from 2101–2600.

Each ship's hour is referred to as a "bell," and a chime sounds over the ship's address system to mark the time. (For example, 0200 is Second Bell, and two chimes sound to announce its commencement.)

A STARMAN'S DAILY ROUTINE

Mid Watch: On watch at duty station (0001-0500). You may rotate sleeping at your station with others assigned to your watch.

Day Watch: Conduct basic tasks associated with your rating, including cleaning your station, stowing unused gear, and performing initial diagnostics and status documentation of your equipment and systems (0501–1000).

Forenoon Watch: Breakfast mess call (1001–1030). Exercise/training either at your post or in available gymnasium facilities. (1031–1200).

Afternoon Watch: Mess call (1201–1215). On watch at duty station (1216–1700).

First Wolfwatch: Station inspection (1701–1710), maintenance and readiness testing drills (1711–1900).

Last Wolfwatch: Station watch at post (1901–2000), mess call (2001–2015), inspection (2016–2100).

First Watch: On call/sleep period. Rest well, Starman!

Groundside Watches

When stationed to a planetside post, the same watch schedule applies except when on leave. In cases where you find yourself "dirtside," in transient quarters for shore leave, you may forgo duty watches, and are actively encouraged to spend downtime preparing for more advanced training. Most military bases offer extensive libraries for the exclusive use of the Imperial military, as well as training grounds for unarmed and armed combat, marksmanship, and explosives use and disposal.

During leave, base officers may require you to use your scheduled duty watches to create reports on your shipboard progress, or review any journals and personal correspondence that you have generated.

Medical screening may also be required, as well as mental health counseling. Your Mighty Empress has made many resources available to you, that you might better yourself and thus better serve Her Empire. Avail yourself of them!

E.V.I.L. SPEAKS

__SESSION BEGINS__

This unit is gratified by your continued interest in the exploits of Forged team SCIMITAR-3.

Initiating question-and-answer algorithm. As always, queries should be sent via Permaweb to:

__ForgedAskEvil@gmail.com__

Please mark any queries as "OK TO PRINT"; this unit reserves the right to edit queries for length, clarity, and/or accuracy.

Virtual community access is available via Permaweb under HEADING_LAZARUS_DISCORD_CHANNEL_THE FORGED and may be accessed at the following node:

https://discord.gg/lazarus-comic

Embed scansequence to same follows:

MESSAGE BEGINS

Hey, E.V.I.L.:

I was wondering about celebrities in Her Eternal Majesty's Empire who aren't Her Eternal Majesty, and the sort of wealth and fame they possess.

-Jack Merry

The unit has observed that humans of all types, both civilian and military, have an innate need for entertainment and what could be termed "play." As with the humans in your time, citizens of the Empire have numerous options in which to find such stimuli. The Empress Herself enjoys live theater, and a royal company of actors regularly performs seasons of full-length plays as well as a wide variety of shorter works.

As the vast majority of Imperial subjects are fascinated with Her Highness, Her enjoyment of a performer often confers widespread attention and acclaim, which is analogous to your century's version of "celebrity."

Such attention can be short-lived, as the Empress's longevity has instilled in Her a love of novelty, and–given Her extended lifespan–it is an increasingly difficult task to create entertainment that is not similar to material which She has already seen.

(Note that the Empress's enjoyment of material dating back centuries often remains popular with Her subjects. For the past half-century, Her fondness for a long-forgotten troupe of comedic performers has captured the fascination of the public. Though the original material has been lost to antiquity, numerous attempts have been made to restore this material, re-making it with new actors. The warname of one SCIMITAR-3 teammate is an homage to this.)

In general, Imperial patronage of the arts is of great financial and social benefit to the artists and performers involved. In addition to enhanced economic status, the Empress often provides luxurious housing and travel accommodations to those She favors, and financial stability is all but assured, at levels far beyond the resources of an average citizen.

Other analogs to your contemporary "celebrities" can be found in Empire-wide Permaweb hubs, akin to "social networks." Currently, the Permaweb service called "Hyoo" is extremely popular (due largely to the Empress expressing mild interest in it). Citizens can post a color swatch representing their emotional state, and users can up- or down-vote those entries based on a complicated social criteria this unit does not fully comprehend. Those with the most successful Hyoos are considered tastemakers, a reputational benefit that can be monetized through endorsements or appearances on popular programming.

This unit occasionally finds the human condition to be rather odd.

E.V.I.L. likes dogs. In the interests of refining this unit's understanding of the readers' era, it is recommended that additional photographic and biographical information on canine companions be distributed to the Permaweb address indicated at the beginning of this transmission.

Reader Peter Morenhout offers the following submission, named "Pooch." It is indicated that Pooch is a "good boy," and he enjoys consuming spaghetti and the droppings of other animals. Intel further indicates that Pooch is a ferocious defender of the forest near his home, and is a credit to dogs everywhere.

SUBJECT: Pooch

SUBJECT: Lil Barda

Graham Cannon offers Lil Barda, citing her fondness for **THE FORGED**. She is indeed a fine dog.

The final canine submission comes from **THE FORGED** co-creator Trautmann, and his newly acquired puppy, Osbourne [a.k.a. "Ozzy"]. Osbourne is a Czech Shepherd, born on Free Comic Book Day 2023, and is loyal, intelligent, and brave. It should be noted that he has an unfortunate tendency to fail his saving throw against sleep.

SUBJECT: Osbourne

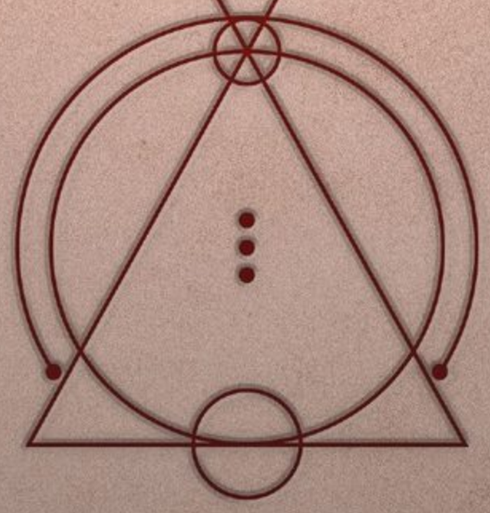
CROSS-TEMPORAL COMMUNICATION ENERGY EXPENDITURE CRITICAL

__SESSION ENDS__

There is no fate.
There is only design.

Koan 002

Scrolls of the Cassandras



NEXT ISSUE:

The second arc concludes! Agents of the Empire attempt to murder Vic and the team in a variety of inventive and horrible ways, but it turns out it's all just a terrible misunderstanding! So, you know, it's just a standard day. Also: Harpo gets laid!

NOVEMBER 15, 2023

image

"My Empress **commands**, and I obey."

Adventure / SciFi / Space Opera

RATED **M** / MATURE

ZONE